Vatican
Vatican News




The new Vatican website features the new pope’s face on the homepage to serve as a welcoming image to visitors. (Courtesy of Vatican.va)



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With a new pope comes a new website.

Pope Francis' death on April 21 prompted the Vatican to initiate a complete makeover of the vatican.va website. It needed to be modern, fresh and accessible on all platforms. The only catch was it had to be ready to launch with the election of the new pontiff, whenever the white smoke emerged from the chimney of the Sistine Chapel.

So, just four days after the Argentine pope died, a graphic designer in Peru named Juan Carlos Ytō received an email from the Vatican, inviting him to be part of this new project.

"They contacted me urgently to lead the design," Ytō said, because "they wanted the new website to launch as soon as the new pope was elected."

Little did Ytō know at the time that the man who on May 8 would become the new pope, the former Cardinal Robert Prevost, had spent much of his life and ministry in Ytō's home country of Peru — an unexpected coincidence when the Vatican asked the artist to help.

Even without knowing it would be Pope Leo XIV, who has dual U.S.-Peruvian citizenship, the assignment would be a high-stake, high-profile job of a lifetime.

Luckily, Ytō is no stranger to working with the Vatican.

Four years ago, he was one of 16 people who took part in the Dicastery for Communication's training program called "Faith Communication in the Digital World." During the program, he worked on different design and communication projects for Vatican institutions.

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The collaboration was just the beginning. Because the dicastery liked his work, officials there began assigning him various freelance and independent projects.

Despite his experience in graphic designing, Ytō said the task to redesign the Vatican website was unusual. "Normally, a project like this would take six months to

a year — even in the best-case scenario," he said. "But this time, we had just a few weeks."

Ytō said there was still so much he had to learn about the Vatican to do this job well.

"I had to understand what the Holy See is, what the Vatican is," he said "I had to learn about things I didn't know before."

Despite the looming deadline, Ytō did not neglect the aesthetic aspects of the new website. Both its layout and colors were carefully chosen and inspired.

The Peruvian designer said the first thing that entered his mind when he received the request was Bernini's colonnade. His thought was that "this website should feel like an embrace from the church to the person visiting."




Vatican.va is home to information on all 267 popes, their writings and the magisterium.  (Courtesy of Vatican.va)

With that in mind, he made sure the new pope's face would be the first thing anyone sees on the site — a welcoming image to visitors.

He also wanted the site to reflect the beauty of the Eternal City. Therefore, he colored the website with a light, pastel blue representing the Roman sky and a warm beige for the stone seen throughout the city.

Yet these two specific colors also have another meaning for Ytō. He said they are a metaphor: "the stone and the sky — the earth and the heavens — coming together. That's what the Holy See represents: the meeting point between earth and heaven, between us and the divine."

The jury remains out on the overall verdict of the new design, which debuted in late May.

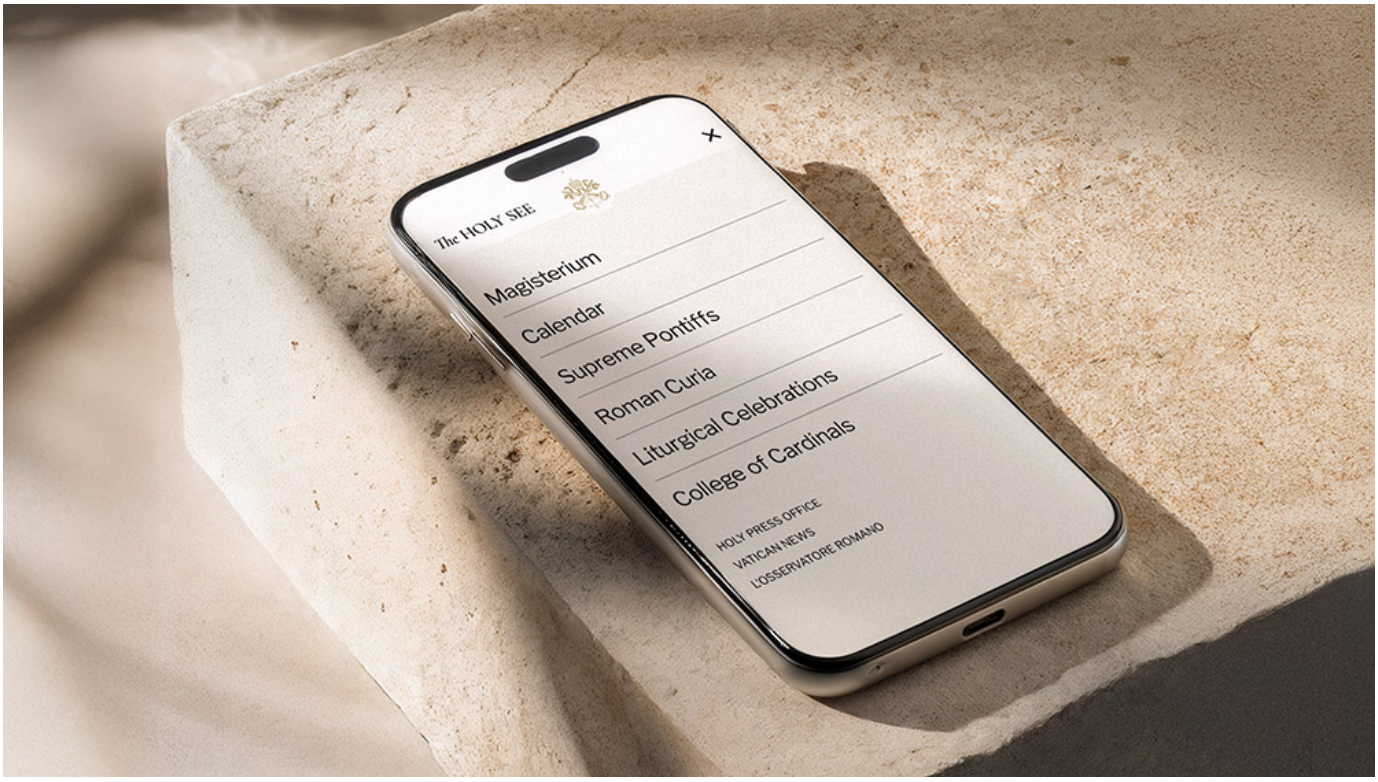
Some people find it refreshing and much-needed as the old design seemed dated. Other sites called the new look "refreshed," "cleaner," "modern" and "sleek."

Others noted an apparent shift to a more pontiff-centered site rather than on the Vatican as an institution.

A common thread throughout all the positive comments has been that this new site seems much simpler to use than the last was for everyday visitors.

Some people have expressed nostalgia for the old website and its familiar "manuscript scroll" feel and color. Others have pointed out that while it is updated, it is still fairly old for 2025.

One web designer from Spain went in depth into the pros and cons of this new site. Luis Martínez explained how the updated version "modernizes the look without losing institutional solemnity."




The Vatican website has been updated to be accessible on all platforms: laptops, tablets and phones. (Courtesy of Vatican.va)

The site is now easier to use and maneuver between the different languages and sections. Martínez also noted the more unified look to the page with Catholic symbolism throughout.

Martinez concurred with some critiques that called for continual improvement of the website, as opposed to how the website under Francis rarely changed. Also, the site still lacks software to download large Vatican files and adequate web accessibility — such as improved "keyboard navigation, limiting usability for people with mobility impairments" and "options for text enlargement, quick access features, or high-contrast mode."

Still, Martinez said that overall the new design "marks a positive step towards a more organized, modern, and globally accessible digital presence."

On the critiques, Ytō said the redesign is just a beginning and the team is still working on the various sections of the page.

For Ytō and his wife, this project was more than just a work assignment. It revealed the strong tie between Peru and the Vatican — a bond thousands now feel. Ytō and his wife have two things in common with Leo XIV: They are Augustinian and Peruvian.

While Ytō never met Cardinal Robert Prevost when he was bishop in Peru, Ytō's wife and brother-in-law are from Chiclayo and were able to get to know the bishop better during their time at an Augustinian school.

So when they heard the "*Habemus papam*" and the name "Prevost" from their home in the South American nation, they both screamed with joy.

"There was a sense of closeness," Ytō said. "It felt like a family member, like an uncle or cousin, had been chosen."

He immediately wrote to the team at the Dicastery for Communication, who shared in their excitement over the connection. The dicastery team referred to this bond as a sign that Ytō was the "right person" to lead the project — and evidence that it was all "God's timing."